APPENDIX

Referee's Report

SUPREME COURT

APPELLATE DIVISION—FIRST JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT

In the Matter

—of—

JOHN R. SANDERS,

An Attorney.

I, GEORGE TROSK, the Referee appointed herein by Order of this Court dated the 18 day of March, 1965 to take testimony with regard to the charges of professional misconduct against the above-named respondent, as set forth in the petition herein verified the 8th day of January, 1965, and to report the same with my opinion, respectfully report as follows:

Before entering upon the performance of my duties as referee herein, to wit, on April 23, 1965, I was duly sworn before Hon. Samuel M. Gold, one of the Justices of the Supreme Court of the State of New York.

Petitioner appeared herein by John G. Bonomi, Esq., its attorney, Raymond R. Whearty, Esq., of counsel; respondent appeared *pro se.*

Hearings were held on September 15, 1965, on June 9, September 14, October 18, November 3 and 23, December 19, 1966, and on January 10, 1967.

Petitioner's brief to the referee was received on February 21, 1967; respondent has not submitted any.

The Charges

The petition herein alleges that respondent has been guilty of

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"neglect; improper withdrawal of estate funds or, in the alternative, overreaching his client, the administratrix of the estate; misrepresentation; and aggravated failure to cooperate with petitioner's Committee on Grievances in a duly authorized investigation of his professional conduct, in violation of Section 90 of the Judiciary Law and Canons 21, 11, 22 and 29 of the Canons of Professional Ethics."

The specifications under the aforesaid allegation are set forth in four separately numbered charges, the allegations of which will be given in detail below, and which for the moment may be epitomized as follows:

Charge 1: Misfeasance and nonfeasance as attorney for an estate;

Charge 2: Misfeasance, and conversion of $800, the property of the estate;

Charge 3: Misrepresentation, to conceal from a client the non-performance of services respondent had been retained to perform;

Charge 4: Failure to cooperate with the Grievance Committee of the Bar Association.

RESPONDENT'S RESERVATION OF "RIGHTS"

Before discussing the charges and the evidence, it is appropriate to note that some of the testimony of Mrs. Underdown, the complainant in Charges 1 and 2, and of her husband, was received over respondent's objection after he had left the hearing, and that later, before commencing to participate in the taking of testimony at the hearings and cross-

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examining the Underdowns, respondent noted on the record that his presence

> "does not constitute a waiver of my objections heretofore raised as to the right to be confronted by the witness Helen Underdown and her husband, to raise objections to any questions asked, make proper motions and to cross-examine those particular witnesses."

This presents the question whether or not, in the circumstances of this case, the referee abused his discretion in taking testimony from the Underdowns in respondent's absence. On this question, the following are the pertinent, material facts.

Notice of a hearing to be held at 10 AM on September 15, 1965 was duly given to respondent personally and by mail.

On September 9, 1965 respondent was informed, in writing, that witnesses were being brought by petitioner from Washington, D. C. to testify at the hearing to be held on the 15th and "In the circumstances you will be expected to be ready to proceed."

In a meeting between respondent and counsel for petitioner in a corridor of the Criminal Courts Building on September 13, respondent requested an adjournment of the

hearing set for the 15th, stating that he was engaged in a trial—he was about to pick a jury—in a case before Mr. Justice Saypol, and was scheduled, upon the conclusion thereof, to commence another trial before Mr. Justice Postal. Petitioner's counsel pointed out to respondent that he had received approximately a month's notice of the September 15th hearing, which respondent admitted; that the hearing herein, being a matter before the Appellate Division, took precedence over a trial at Trial Term; that in the circumstances respondent was not entitled to proceed

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in the case he was then in, or in the one to follow, and he would be expected to proceed on the 15th. Respondent said he would file an affidavit of engagement.

No further communication, written or oral, was received from respondent by either counsel for petitioner or the referee until, at 10:35 AM on September 15th—a Wednesday—respondent entered the hearing room and stated he had been "held up" at a Calendar Call in the Civil Court—obviously, in neither of the Supreme Court cases to which he had referred in his conversation with petitioner's attorney on the 13th—and that he would not say he had been "forced" on trial in the case before Mr. Justice Saypol, but he had been "technically" on trial since the preceding Thursday, inasmuch as one juror had then been sworn, and since then the rest of the jury had been impanelled; that the first witness was about to be sworn, and the trial would, in respondent's opinion, continue "for a period of possibly two weeks."

Respondent was "trial counsel", not the attorney of record, in the case before Mr. Justice Saypol.

The referee pointed out to respondent that he should have informed Mr. Justice Saypol of the situation—which

respondent admitted he had not done—and that there were two witnesses who had come from Washington, D. C. to testify that morning, as respondent had been informed they would be, and that they were then outside, waiting to be called.

After some colloquy, and with a view to accommodating respondent if possible, the referee had the two witnesses come into the hearing room and explained respondent's situation to them; they were told that respondent had agreed—as he had before they came in—that if they would return on another day, he would pay their traveling expenses in coming to and returning from the hearing, and their hotel expenses while here to testify, as petitioner had [5]
done for the hearing that day, and they were asked whether or not they would be willing to come back on another day on these conditions.

The witnesses stated they would be willing to do so.

Respondent requested the adjournment be for a month, i.e., to October 14; by that time, he said, he would have finished the case he was in, and would have had time, thereafter, to prepare for a hearing herein on the 14th. The matter was thereupon adjourned to October 14, 1965, expressly in reliance on respondent's representation that he would send the Underdowns the money to cover their expenses.

Following the last mentioned session, hearings were scheduled for three successive dates, i.e., October 14, December 7 and March 3. In each of the notices sent to respondent of these hearings he was reminded that the hearing would take precedence over other engagements, and of his obligation to send the Underdowns the money for their travel and hotel expenses in coming to New York to

attend the hearing. In addition, the notice of the March 3rd hearing stated—as the referee requested it should—that the referee directed respondent to advise the referee whether or not respondent had complied with the undertaking to send the Underdowns the money to cover their expenses. Respondent did not respond to that direction.

The aforesaid hearings scheduled for October 14, December 7 and March 3, 1966 were not held, Mrs. Underdown having, after the hearing of September 15th, suffered an accident which disabled her from coming to New York on those days.

On April 7, 1966 respondent was served with Notice that the hearing would proceed on May 4, 1966; on April 14,

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1966 petitioner wrote respondent reminding him that the hearing set for May 4th was an engagement of the Appellate Division, which would take precedence over others, and of his obligation to send the Underdowns the money to cover their travel and hotel expenses.

On April 29, 1966 the referee received from respondent a telegram stating that "due to no fault on my part", the case of United States against Leroy Davis had been marked "ready for trial this week and assigned to a United States District Judge for Monday, May 22, 1966, so that I am actually engaged on trial and unfortunately will be unable to appear in my matter. Therefore, I must, under the circumstances, request an adjournment."

At the referee's direction, petitioner thereupon wrote respondent that his application for an adjournment had been denied; that the hearing would proceed on May 4th, 1966, as scheduled. In that letter, petitioner also notified respondent that on May 4, 1966 petitioner would move to amend its petition to include the additional charges that

respondent had failed to honor his commitment to send the Underdowns their expenses, and had failed to respect communications in reference thereto.

On May 3, 1966 Mr. Justice Breitel held a conference with respondent and counsel for petitioner in reference to a proposed order presented by respondent, requiring petitioner to show cause why the May 4, 1966 hearing should not be stayed. The parties, with Mr. Justice Breitel's assistance, and in his presence, came to an agreement by which the May 4th hearing was cancelled, on the faith of certain commitments—hereinafter described—then made by respondent with reference to his attendance on an adjourned date.

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In accordance with the aforesaid agreement, notice was duly given to respondent of a hearing to be held on June 9, 1966. On that day respondent appeared; his opening statement was: "I am here and I am not here"—and he then went on to say that he was, and for about a month had been, actually on trial in the United States District Court in the case of United States against Aiken, et al., in which he represented Leroy Davis, one of the defendants; that the "nexus" of the case then involved his client, and, if the government finished its direct case, respondent would have to cross-examine within the next half-hour or thereabouts; that he would be in contempt if he failed to appear there at 10:15 AM, and that he desired, and believed it was his right, to be "confronted" by the petitioner's witnesses.

Respondent then stated that when, at the May 3rd conference with Mr. Justice Breitel, he had suggested, and agreed on, June 9th as the adjourned date, he had expected that the trial of U. S. v. Davis, which he had then been in,

would be concluded before June 9th, but that because of the illness of jurors, and deaths in the families of jurors, in that case, it had been necessary to take recesses which delayed the trial; that he was, therefore, not ready to go on, and he requested an adjournment.

The foregoing request had to be considered in the light of (1) what had occurred at the May 3rd conference before Mr. Justice Breitel, as the result of which the May 4th hearing had been postponed to June 9th, and (2) the fact that the Underdowns had again come on from Washington, D. C. and were in the corridor outside the hearing room, waiting to testify.

At the May 3rd conference, the question whether or not the May 4th hearing should be adjourned and, if so, to [8]
what date, was debated and it was finally agreed that it should be adjourned to June 9th, a date selected by respondent, on the distinct agreement by respondent that he would proceed herein on June 9th, whether or not U. S. v. Aiken had previously been concluded, subject only to an earlier hearing herein of the Aiken case should finish in time to have a hearing herein prior to June 9th.

The minutes herein record the following colloquy at a later hearing held herein:

> The Referee: Was it the agreement [before Mr. Justice Breitel on May 3rd] that you were to go on here [on June 9th] whether or not your Federal case had been completed?
>
> Mr. Sanders: That is true, Sir."

Mr. Justice Breitel having said that the arrangement made before him should be put into a written stipulation,

counsel for the Grievance Committee prepared one and, on May 4th, 1966 sent it to respondent in triplicate with a letter of transmittal requesting respondent to sign and return two copies of the stipulation.

The said stipulation contained the following provisions as to what had been agreed upon before Mr. Justice Breitel:

> "5. In the event a hearing herein is scheduled to be held June 9, 1966, and on any continued dates thereafter, respondent is to attend said hearing or hearings, notwithstanding the said criminal prosecution entitled *United States* v. *Aiken et al.* may be then still in progress.
>
> "6. No further adjournments herein will be granted unless application therefore is addressed to the Referee and the same is granted by him."

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The letter transmitting the stipulations to respondent was to the same effect as the stipulation and, in addition, contained this sentence:

> "You will recall that Judge Breitel referred to the date June 9th, which you selected, as a 'copper-clad' date for hearing."

Respondent admits that he received the aforesaid letter and the stipulation which accompanied it, and that he did not sign and return the stipulation. He admits the stipulation accurately recorded the agreement he made before Mr. Justice Breitel; his reason for not signing and returning it, as he admits he expressed it to petitioner's counsel when the latter asked him why he did not do so, was: "I do not want to hang myself." This was before the events which

respondent claimed, at the June 9th session, had intervened since May 3rd to disable him from carrying out the agreement he made that day to proceed on June 9th, and could well justify the conclusion that at the time respondent made that agreement he intended not to perform it.

It was not until June 8th, the day before hearing scheduled for the 9th, that respondent told counsel for petitioner that respondent would not proceed on the 9th although, if the reasons he gave on the 9th be true, he must have known well in advance of the 9th that he would not proceed on that day. In the meantime petitioner, having no reason to suppose that the hearing set forth the 9th would not proceed, as scheduled, had sent the Underdowns the money to cover their travel and hotel expenses—respondent having again failed to carry out his undertaking to do so—and they were here, outside the hearing room, waiting to be called.

It was in the light of the foregoing and the fact that,

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irrespective of any question of fault, no testimony had yet been taken although upwards of a year had elapsed since the Order of Reference, that the referee announced to respondent on June 9th that the hearing would not be adjourned; that the Underdowns would not be required to come back a third time; and that it was up to respondent to decide whether or not he would abandon the hearing.

Nevertheless, the referee also stated that if respondent did not remain, any testimony taken, and any exhibits received in his absence, would be taken and received subject to his right to object, and that he would be given the opportunity in ample time prior to the next hearing—as, in fact he was—to read the transcript of the testimony and the exhibits to enable him to make any such objections at the next hearing; further, that if, after read-

ing the transcript, respondent wanted to cross-examine the Underdowns, a time convenient to all would be fixed, and the Underdowns would then come back for that purpose, provided respondent sent them the money to cover their expenses.

Although respondent declared, referring to his agreement to proceed on June 9th:

> "I am certainly bound by any agreement, I made. I am not trying to avoid that"—

he asked to be "excused", and when the referee declined to "excuse" him, he took an "exception" and left the hearing.

The Underdowns were then examined on direct by counsel for petitioner, Mrs. Underdown for forty-seven pages and Mr. Underdown for six.

Two weeks before October 18, 1966, the date of the next [11]
session, respondent, as he admits, received notice that the minutes of the September 15th hearing, and all the exhibits introduced thereat, were available to him at the Committee's office. However, he did not look at them; as he stated at the October 18th hearing: "I have prepared myself otherwise * * * I didn't think I would need them."

At a hearing held November 3, 1966, the Underdowns were back. Respondent, after first reserving all his "rights" conducted a cross-examination of Mrs. Underdown which covers upwards of a hundred pages of the minutes and a re-cross for five more; his cross-examination of Mr. Underdown covers two pages.

In the testimony given by respondent on his own direct examination, he dealt at length with the testimony the

Underdowns had given and with the documents introduced during their testimony, and he gave his own version of the incidents in reference to which the Underdowns had testified.

Granting that a respondent in a disciplinary proceeding is entitled to reasonable notice of hearing and a reasonable opportunity to confront and examine the witnesses against him [Matter of Eldridge, 82 NY 162, 167 (1880), but see Matter of Young, 284 App Div 406 (1st Dept. 1954)], he may not, after receiving such notice, impede or frustrate the proceeding by walking away from the hearing on the ground that he has another engagement—particularly when such engagement is not entitled to precedence over the one in this court, and the hearing is held on a date to which it had been adjourned five weeks previously at his own request, and on which, in consideration of the adjournment granted him, he had solemnly promised that he would proceed, whether or not such other engagement had previously been concluded.

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In the foregoing circumstances, it is submitted, the referee did not abuse his discretion by taking testimony from the Underdowns on June 9, 1966 (See Matter of Case, 24 App. Div. 2d 797; 3rd Dept. 1965).

Charge 1: The petition alleges:

> On January 25, 1957, respondent, as attorney for Helen Bowman Underdown, of Washington, D. C., the administratrix of the estate of Sylvester F. Bowman, deceased, received $4,570.30, being the net proceeds of the sale of the decedent's interest in a parcel of real property in New York City; on the same day, respondent deposited these proceeds in an account then opened

in the Industrial Bank of Commerce in the name of "Estate of Sylvester F. Bowman, deceased, Helen Bowman Underdown, Executrix, c/o John R. Sanders, Room 4107, 225 Broadway, New York 7, N. Y." Respondent retained the bank pass-book for said account, and failed to comply with the administratrix' requests from time to time for advice as to the use respondent had made of several checks which, at the time of the opening of the account, the administratrix had signed in blank, and delivered to respondent at his request for use in paying estate and realty taxes; respondent also failed to comply with the administratrix' requests from time to time to send her the pass book, cancelled checks and bank statements; in 1962 the administratrix instructed the bank to send said data to her. No partial distribution of the proceeds of said sale has been made, respondent taking the position that no distribution could be made pending the disposition of the Saratoga property, hereinafter referred to.

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The decedent also left a one-half interest in certain real property in Saratoga, New York which, by order made in February, 1958, the Surrogate directed the administratrix to take the necessary steps to sell; respondent thereupon procured an appraisal of the property, but failed to list it for sale with a broker until 1962; on or about May 8, 1963, a prospective purchaser signed a contract to buy the property for $2500, subject to approval by the Surrogate's Court, and delivered to respondent checks representing the full purchase price; respondent did not deposit said checks and did not seek court approval of the sale. Although, at the

time the aforesaid bank-account was opened in 1957, the administratrix, at respondent's request, had signed in blank and delivered to respondent checks to be used in paying the realty taxes, they were not paid, and the City of Saratoga took title to the property in 1960 for non-payment of taxes. In May 1963 the former prospective purchaser of the Saratoga property from the estate bought it from the City of Saratoga at a tax sale.

At a hearing before petitioner's Grievance Committee on May 16, 1963, respondent testified that he was then in the process of applying to the Surrogates Court for approval of the sale of the Saratoga property pursuant to the aforesaid May 8, 1963 contract, and that he would make partial distribution immediately; on June 13, 1963 respondent represented to petitioner's Committee on Grievances that such an application was pro- [14]
gressing, and he estimated it would be concluded in the next several days; on April 16, 1964, respondent represented to the Committee that said purchaser was agreeable to paying the contract price for the property, less the amount of taxes paid; that in fact respondent made no partial distribution until November 1963, and up to the time of the conclusion of the hearings before the Grievance Committee on April 16, 1964, respondent had not applied to the Surrogate's Court for approval of the sale.

THE ANSWER

In view of the way respondent has dealt with this Charge, his answers should be described at length.

In respondent's original answer, verified March 2, 1965, he "denies each and every allegation" in the paragraphs of the petition containing this charge.

At the hearing of September 14, 1966, after respondent conceded that testimony and documents previously introduced showed that many of the allegations of the petition which he had denied in his answer were incontrovertibly true, he stated that he had been pressed to get his answer in on time; that he had had "no opportunity to analyze the petition and properly answer it, as I would have liked" and that it was his intention, and he would, amend his answer "to conform with the truth of the matters which will be adduced upon the record."

Inasmuch as such a course, if followed, would have resulted in the continuing of the hearings with the issues left undefined pending the submission of an amended answer, respondent was requested to state his position orally in the meantime, and thereupon, for the record, he admitted the

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allegations of Charge 1 contained in paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 14 and 15 of the petition; he denied part of paragraph 7, denied knowledge or information as to paragraph 8 and asked that the remaining allegations of this charge—paragraphs 10, 12, 13 and 16 to 20 be left "open".

At the hearing of October 18, 1966, respondent stated that, in order that petitioner's counsel would have an opportunity to see respondent's amended answer in advance of the next session, respondent would serve it "at least a day or two before the next hearing", which had therefore been set for November 3, 1966. Although the amended answer was verified by respondent on October 28th, 1960, he did not present it, or give a copy of it to petitioner's counsel until in the midst of the afternoon session on November

13, 1966. In that amended answer, respondent expressly admits some allegations he had orally admitted at the September 14th hearing, and makes no reference—he neither admits, denies or otherwise alludes to—any of the other allegations of the petition on this charge.

At a later hearing, after some colloquy about the unsatisfactory state of the pleadings, respondent, either categorically or in effect, orally admitted various additional paragraphs of the petition, and denied paragraphs 7, 8 and 13. When his attention was called to the fact that his oral denial of paragraphs 7, 8 and 13 was inconsistent with his written, amended answer of October 28, 1966, which, by failure to deny, admitted all the allegations of the petition, respondent said he would submit a revised amended answer "sometime this week". No revised amended answer has been interposed.

Strictly speaking, therefore, all the allegations of Charge [16]
1 stand admitted. However, if we were to give respondent the benefit of the doubt, and treat paragraphs 7, 8 and 13 as denied, the issues under this charge would be:

(Par. 7):

Were the signed, blank estate checks which the administratrix delivered to respondent about the time the estate account was opened "to be used for payment of estate and realty taxes";

Respondent admits receiving the checks; the denial raises only the question: was he to use them solely to pay taxes, or was he also authorized to fill out one of them to his own order, for $800, allegedly in payment of a fee due him. This contention is

involved in Charge II, which charges respondent with conversion of estate funds by the use of the proceeds of this check.

(Par. 8):

Did respondent fail to comply with Mrs. Underdown's requests from time to time that he advise her of the use made of said blank checks, and that he send her the pass-book, cancelled checks and bank statements;

(Par. 13):

Did Mrs. Underdown ascertain, subsequent to about May 8, 1963, that the City of Saratoga Springs had taken title to the Saratoga property for non-payment of taxes, although she had delivered signed, blank checks to respondent in or about January, 1957 for the purpose of paying them.

Respondent admits the receipt of the checks and the sale of the property for non-payment of taxes. Here again, as in reference to the issue under paragraph 7, the denial raises only the question of whether or not the checks were given to him for use only in the payment of taxes.

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THE EVIDENCE

On March 28, 1955, Helen Bowman Underdown (Mrs. Underdown), a resident and domiciliary of Washington, D. C., was appointed administratrix of the estate of her uncle, Sylvester F. Bowman, who had died on May 19, 1951, a resident of New York County.

The delay in Mrs. Underdown's appointment was due to the fact that the decedent was not known to have left any

assets until it developed, in the course of the administration of the estate of his brother Harry, that Sylvester had a half interest in two pieces of real estate, one in New York City and the other in the City of Saratoga, which were involved in the Harry Bowman estate.

The only assets of Sylvester's estate were his half-interests in the aforesaid two pieces of real estate. The combined appraised value of these two half-interests was $7250.

The New York City property was sold on October 31, 1957 for $11,000. After deducting adjustments made at the closing, and the payment out of cash received at the sale of a fee of $300 to respondent, the estate was left with $4270.

From the closing, respondent and Mrs. Underdown repaired to the Industrial Bank of Commerce, 56 East 42nd Street, New York City, where respondent caused an account to be opened in the name "Estate of Sylvester F. Bowman, deceased, Helen Bowman Underdown, Executrix, c/o John R. Sanders, Room 4107, 225 Broadway, New York 7, N. Y." and the $4270 was deposited therein.

In a Decree dated April 1, 1958, made by Surrogate DeFalco on an Intermediate Accounting, the administratrix was directed "to take such steps as may be necessary

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to sell the decedent's interest in the property located in Saratoga Springs." Respondent then procured an appraisal of the property, which gave the value at $4,000.

Respondent waited about four years, i.e., until 1962, to list the property with a broker for sale.

Respondent gave two reasons for the delay.

Respondent's first reason was that Harry Bowman, who died the owner of a half interest in the property, had left

a will in which he gave his widow, Margaret, a life estate therein and that, consequently, she was entitled to remain therein. In a petition made in 1957, respondent had pointed out that Margaret had elected to take against the will. However, he said, there had been no effort to sell the Saratoga property because the parties interested in the estate did not want to sell the property over Margaret's head. If respondent had kept himself informed as to what was going on with respect to this relatively substantial asset of the estate, he would have known that there was no reason, on that ground, to delay efforts to sell: he would have known that Margaret had been dead for three years before he learned of her death, as he did from Mrs. Underdown, in the following circumstances. Without Mrs. Underdown's knowledge, respondent had entered into a contract to sell the Saratoga property subject to Court approval, for $2500. When Mrs. Underdown learned of this, she tried and tried, without success, to get respondent to respond to her attempts to communicate with him about the value of the property, which she felt was in excess of $2500. Failing in her efforts to reach respondent, Mrs. Underdown went to Saratoga to inspect the property, and there she learned that Margaret Bowman had been dead

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three years, and that others had been in possession of the property for two. On her return from Saratoga, Mrs. Underdown apprised respondent of these facts, theretofore unknown to him.

Respondent had received two checks, aggregating $2500, from his proposed purchaser, but had not deposited them; he never sought Court approval of his proposed sale; Mrs. Underdown repudiated the transaction, and although the

proposed purchaser's checks remained with respondent, the sale was not consummated.

Respondent's second excuse for the failure to take steps to effect a sale of the Saratoga property between the Surrogate's direction to do so in 1958 and his listing of the property with a broker in 1962, boils down, as does his excuse for his other delays and inaction, to his assertion that he was unable to get the necessary "cooperation" from Harry's estate and the other parties interested in the property, i.e., four nieces besides Mrs. Underdown and two nephews, all of whom were of full age and sound mind. This alleged lack of cooperation consisted, according to respondent, of their failure to attend conferences to discuss estate problems, or to agree on what should be done about them, or how. For example, said respondent, this lack of cooperation left the two estates, Harry's and Sylvester's, at odds as to which of them was responsible for the payment of taxes on the Saratoga property, and while they continued to fail to agree, the taxes remained unpaid and the arrearages were permitted to pile up, until the City of Saratoga finally stepped in and sold the property for unpaid taxes—of which Mrs. Underdown was not informed until much later. The purchaser at the tax sale was the same individual as the one to whom respondent had previously contracted to sell the property for $2500, and it was

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reported, subsequently, that he was still willing to pay that amount, less the taxes he had paid at the tax sale, for a deed.

At a hearing before the Grievance Committee on May 16, 1963, respondent testified that he was then in the process of applying to the Surrogates Court for approval of the sale of the Saratoga property to the former proposed pur-

chaser—"I am working on that right now"—and, he said, it would then take "a week or two" to complete the deal with the proposed purchaser. At a later hearing, to wit, on June 13, 1963, respondent told the Committee he was still trying to get agreement among the interested parties about a sale and

> "I would say that within the next three, four, five days, very probably we will be able to distribute, in addition to that, transfer the property."

No application to sell the property has ever been presented to the Surrogate: again respondent attributes his failure to do so to the continued lack of "cooperation" by the interested parties or their attorneys.

Respondent admitted he had not given the Grievance Committee the reasons he gave here for not applying for approval of the sale "in the detail I am doing it now. I just wasn't as thorough * * * that's all I can say."

For all that appears, the Saratoga property is gone; the estate has received nothing for its interest therein, and apparently it never will.

In Surrogate DeFalco's decree on the Intermediate Accounting, he sustained objections to certain reported re-

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ceipts of income and disbursements in reference to the real estate, and directed the administratrix

> "to proceed to account to the objectant for all receipts, income and expenses in connection with the said two properties."

That was on April 1, 1958, and still there has been no final accounting or distribution—again, according to respon-

dent, because of the alleged failure of other interested parties to "cooperate."

Lack of cooperation by interested parties is, of course, no excuse for failure of an attorney to take steps necessary to the prompt and efficient administration of an estate. One might suppose, listening to respondent's attempted avoidances, that he was oblivious of the fact that the Surragates Court is there for the very purpose of overcoming recalcitrance or lack of cooperation on the part of interesfed parties, making such orders and decrees as might be necessary by reason thereof, and that this would be none the less so, even if, as respondent claimed in partial explanation of his failure to seek such relief, he had, for a time, been unable to locate one of the distributees. The fact is that respondent knows his explanation and excuses are insufficient, as a matter of law, as appears from the following colloquy at a meeting of the Grievance Committee held May 16, 1963.

> "Mr. McClung: [one of the members of the Committee]: You seem to me to be a little taking the position that because the parties wouldn't agree here, there was nothing you could do. That really isn't so, is it?
>
> The Respondent: No sir, I don't mean to take that position. I have other matters to state along that line"—
>
> [22]

and again respondent went off on the same tack as before: his inability to get the other interested parties, or their attorneys, to agree on what should be done, or how.

The true reason for respondent's inaction and delays was, as he finally admitted, that at that time the Surrogate's Court was, to him, terra incognita, a labyrinth of

whose turnings he was blissfully ignorant. Thus, when a member of the Grievance Committee taxed respondent with having, by the use of one of the signed blank checks Mrs. Underdown had entrusted to him, taken $800 in the guise of a fee, without court approval, respondent said that the $800 was for services to Mrs. Underdown individually, and not as administratrix. He was unable, there, or here, to point to any service he had performed or was to perform, for Mrs. Underdown individually: he admitted that she had no interest adverse to, or in conflict with, the interests of the estate; that all she could, or did, look for from the estate was the check which she, as administratrix, would hand herself, individually, as a distributee, just as she would do with respect to every other distributee. Moreover, if the $800 was for payment for services rendered to Mrs. Underdown individually, the Committee asked respondent by what right he made out an Estate check to himself in payment therefor. His answer was:

> "I have received checks of this type myself dozens and dozens of times. * * * I would say it is 99% of the practice."

Yet, in the next breath, when he was asked whether or not it was his normal practice to take whatever the Surrogate allowed him for his fee, and also to take a part of what his client received as an estate distributee, his answer was:

[23]

> "I can't answer yes or no. I don't practice in the Surrogate's Court. I practice 95% in the Criminal Court * * * I don't suppose I have had in my entire practice more than two or three Surrogate's matters."

Thus was finally disclosed the true reason for respondent's delays, inaction and misfeasance. He would have done himself a service if he had frankly admitted it here, instead of trusting that the referee would not discover the fact by reading the minutes before the Grievance Committee, and fabricating one improvisation after another, in an effort to suit the occasion as it arose.

In my opinion this charge has been sustained.

[24]

CHARGE II. The petition alleges:

> By decree of the Surrogate's Court dated April 1, 1958, respondent was allowed $700 for counsel fees, $300 of which had been received by him in cash on January 25, 1957, upon the closing of the sale of the New York City property, and the remaining $400 of which he received by the use of one of the checks which the administratrix had signed and left with respondent; on April 2, 1959, without notice to the administratrix, and without approval of the Surrogate, respondent withdrew the further sum of $800 from the Estate account, using another of the aforesaid checks which the administratrix had left with him to pay estate and realty taxes. After having tried, without success, to get the bank pass-book, cancelled checks and bank statements from respondent, the administratrix, in August 1962, had the bank send them to her. The bank statement, when received by the administratrix, showed a withdrawal of $800 on April 2, 1959. She sought, unsuccessfully, to get from respondent an explanation concerning this withdrawal. On August 31, 1962, respondent redeposited $800 in the estate account, he having received, earlier in August 1962, but had not answered, two requests from petitioner's Grievance

Committee to appear at the office of its counsel in connection with a complaint which the administratrix had registered with it. In September 196?, respondent visited the administratrix in Washington, stating to her that he had encountered some difficulty and had

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used the $800, but had replaced it, and requesting her not to appear before petitioner's Grievance Committee.

THE ANSWER

Respondent's original answer, verified March 2, 1965, denied all the allegations in this Charge.

At the hearing held September 14, 1966, respondent orally admitted paragraphs 20, 21, 22 and 23 of the petition, and asked that the remaining paragraphs 24 to 32 be left "open".

At a later hearing, respondent orally denied paragraphs 24, 25, 26 and 32, and admitted paragraphs 27 to 31, inclusive.

His Amended Answer, verified October 28, 1966, expressly admits the allegations of paragraphs 20, 21, 22 and 23 of petition, and makes no reference, by way of admission, denial or otherwise, to any of the other allegations in this Charge.

At the hearing held January 10, 1967, respondent's attention was called to the fact that his Amended Answer, by failing to deny any of the allegations in this Charge, left all of them admitted. He said that had not been his intention, and that he would submit a revised Amended Answer, but he has not done so.

If, despite the foregoing, we treat as denied all the allegations of the charge which respondent had previously denied orally, the issues under this charge would be:

(a) Was respondent's withdrawal of the $800 authorized by Mrs. Underdown;

(b) Did respondent fail to respond to the administratrix' requests that he forward to her the bank pass-book, cancelled checks and bank statements; did she then request the bank to send the data to her and, after receiving the bank statement, did she attempt, unsuccessfully, to obtain from the [26] respondent an explanation of the $800 withdrawal on April 2, 1959;

(c) did respondent visit the administratrix in Washington, D. C., in September 1962 and there state to her that he had encountered some difficulty and had used the $800, but had replaced it, and request her not to appear before the petitioner's Grievance Committee.

The Evidence

On October 31, 1957, Mrs. Underdown, as Administratrix of the Estate of Sylvester F. Bowman, deceased, accompanied by respondent, her attorney, opened an estate account in the Industrial Bank of Commerce with a deposit of $4270.30, the remaining proceeds of a sale that day of the estate's half interest in certain New York City real estate. Respondent took possession of the bank pass-book and directed the bank to send statements of the account and returned vouchers to him, at his office, Room 4107, 225 Broadway, New York, New York 10007.

At respondent's request, Mrs. Underdown then signed, in blank, and delivered to respondent, several checks drawn on the aforesaid estate bank account.

Thereafter, on numerous occasions, Mrs. Underdown tried, by letter and by telephone, to get from respondent a statement of the condition of the bank account, but he did not answer her letters and she was never able to make personal contact with him. Finally, on August 11, 1962, [27] almost five years after the account had been opened, Mrs. Underdown, still in ignorance of what had been going on in the account, wrote the bank, inquiring as to the "status of the account" and requesting the bank to send bank statements and returned vouchers to her, at her address in Washington, D. C.

Without waiting for the receipt of the bank statement, and on August 12, 1962, Mrs. Underdown wrote the Grievance Committee, complaining that respondent had failed to make distribution of the proceeds of the sale of the New York City real estate, received in January 1957, and of his failure to respond to her numerous communications to him.

On August 17, 1962 the Grievance Committee wrote respondent that it had received from Mrs. Underdown a "complaint of neglect" by him, and requesting him to call at the Committee's office on August 31, 1962.

When Mrs. Underdown received the bank statement, she noted that on one occasion $400, and on another, $800, had been withdrawn from the account.

On August 31, 1962 respondent restored $800 to the estate account.

In September, 1962, respondent appeared, unannounced, at the Underdown home in Washington, D. C. and had a conversation with Mrs. Underdown, at which her husband was present. Respondent explained that the $400 withdrawal had been made by his use of one of the signed, blank checks which Mrs. Underdown had left with him: it was

the balance, after crediting the $300 he had received at the closing, of an allowance of $700 which the Surrogate had made to him for his fees upon an intermediate accounting in 1958.

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None of the foregoing is in dispute.

With respect to the $800 check, the evidence is conflicting, and will be discussed below.

Respondent admits that the $800 check was one of the blank checks Mrs. Underdown had signed and left with him at the time the bank account was opened; that he filled it in for $800, making it to his own order. He claimed that he was authorized to do so under a retainer agreement Mrs. Underdown had made with him in his office in 1957.

After first saying that he could not recall the 1957 retainer conversation, respondent testified that in that conversation it was "definitely discussed" that he would apply to the Surrogate for a fee, and that the blank checks left with him were to "cover any and all expenses, whether they be taxes, water, fee or what have you." He had previously told the Grievance Committee that these checks had been left with him for use "in case of an emergency."

Respondent said, also, that he had a written "fee agreement" with Mrs. Underdown for one-half of whatever she would get from the estate for representing her, individually, plus whatever allowance the Surrogate would give the estate, and that when he drew the $800 he "considered" himself "covered" by that agreement. This taking of a fee, it should be noted, was without application to the Surrogate, and would be in violation, even of respondent's own description of his alleged retainer agreement, by which, he said, he was to apply to the Surrogate for his fee.

Elsewhere, respondent relied on an alleged wriften retainer agreement which he said Mrs. Underdown had made, [29] not with respondent, but with Mr. Baker, with whom respondent had been associated until Mr. Baker's elevation to the Bench, at which time respondent succeeded Judge Baker, as attorney.

Respondent was quite specific about the terms of that alleged retainer; he said he had read it, and, according to its terms Mr. Baker was to get one-half of anything that came into the estate, plus one-half of anything Mrs. Underdown got out of it:

> "if the estate got $5,000, Mr. Baker would get $2500 of that * * * and if, out of that [$5000] Mrs. Underdown got $1250, he would get half of that."

Respondent attempted to mitigate his taking of the $800 without the Surrogate's approval, by asserting that the $800 represented not only what was coming to him for the estate, but also what Mrs. Underdown owed him for services rendered to her, individually. He said, however, that he had not attempted to allocate how much was for services for her, individually, and how much was for services to the estate.

Respondent, when before the Grievance Committee, and likewise here, was unable to identify any service which had been performed or was to be performed for Mrs. Underdown individually; he admitted there was no conflict of interest between her, individually, and the estate, and that all she expected individually was the check which she, as administratrix, would issue to herself, as a distributee, upon distribution of the estate, just as she would then issue checks, as administratrix, to other distributees.

Respondent testified that when he called on Mrs. Underdown in Washington in September 1962, she said she remembered "vaguely" signing a retainer; that the only question in her mind was whether it was for one-half or

[30]

one-third; that he told her to look for her copy and he would try to find his, and "In the meantime, I will return the $800 to the account" and she could repay him "when the estate was wound up, if she agreed."

Respondent has not produced any written retainer agreement by Mrs. Underdown with either him or Mr. Baker, and she denies there ever was one.

Respondent testified that as the result of "burglaries, thefts, larcenies and evictions" of which he had been the victim, the written retainer has "disappeared". He testified that Mr. Baker's secretary might recall the terms of the retainer, and one hearing was adjourned to enable him to try to locate her, and when, on January 10, 1967, the hearings were closed, it was with the expressed understanding that if respondent located her at any time before the referee filed his report, the hearings would be reopened to receive her testimony. There has been no further word from respondent.

I put no stock in respondent's assertion that he thought Mr. Baker's secretary might help him establish the existence of the retainer. If respondent's testimony be true he knew, when he left Mrs. Underdown in September 1962, that it would be important for him to establish that, by the terms of the retainer, he was entitled to take the $800; he left her with the statement that, when he got back to New York, he would search for it. Obviously he did not find it. He must have realized then the importance of locating proof of its terms; the importance of doing so was fur-

ther impressed on him in May 1963, when he received the Committee's charge letter, and if he was not fully aware of it, even then, he certainly learned it during the hearings before the Committee commencing shortly thereafter.

In these circumstances it is inconceivable that he would have waited until the hearings before the referee were almost over to start trying to locate Mr. Baker's secretary.

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The Saratoga property having been taken by the City of Saratoga for non-payment of taxes, the only asset on which the estate could, or did, realize anything was the New York City property. Under the terms of the retainer agreement, which respondent testified Mrs. Underdown had made with Mr. Baker, he would have received one-half of the $4570.30 which the estate received, net, for the New York City property, i.e., $2285.15, and the distributees would share what was left of the remaining $2285.15. The record does not show the per stirpital shares of the distributees—five nieces and two nephews—but the testimony is that Mrs. Underdown has received $812.73. On that basis, Mr. Baker would have been entitled to receive, from Mrs. Underdown, an additional $406.36, making his total $2691.51; Mrs. Underdown would have been left with $406.36, and each of the other six distributees, assuming they shared the remaining $1472.42 ($2285.15 — $812.73) equally, would receive $245.40.

As far as respondent is concerned, he received $700 by Court allowance and he claims he was entitled to the $800 he got through the medium of the blank check he filled in—a total of $1500; as against which the Underdowns got $812.73, and each of the other six distributees, assuming they would share the remaining $3757.57 equally, would

receive $626.26. A retainer agreement by an estate attorney which would work out in such fashion would be invalid, and no Surrogate would permit it to be enforced (In re Gasco, App. Div. 2nd, Dec. 1966; 275 N. Y. S. 2d, 871 n.o.r.; Re Young, Surr. Suff. Co. Dec. 1966; 275 N. Y. S. 2d 897, n.o.r.).

Mrs. Underdown testified that one of the other parties interested in the estate advised her to retain Mr. Baker;

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that she retained Mr. Baker by telephone, she being in Washington and he here; that she has never met Mr. Baker, and that she never had any agreement with him, written or oral, for the payment of any specified amount or percentage; that when Mr. Baker was elevated to the Bench, respondent took over "as is", and there was never any conversation between them as to fees.

Mrs. Underdown's attention was called to the fact that according to the minutes of her testimony before the Grievance Committee, she testified there that Mr. Baker's fee was to be one-third of what she got. Mrs. Underdown testified here that she did not intend to say that; that her appearance before the Committee was her first experience at a hearing, and she was "confused and nervous" and "upset"; that her arrangement with Mr. Baker was that he was to get a "percentage", but "At no time did we agree to one-third or one-half or one-fourth or anything"; that no "percentage" had been stipulated, they never got down to "fractions", because Mr. Baker said that they did not know the worth of the estate, what taxes they would have to pay, or what she would receive; it was her idea that when the time came to make out a bill, Mr. Baker would get "his natural allowed amount."

Mrs. Underdown testified that there was no conversation with respondent about representing her in any capacity other than as administratrix, and she never understood that he did.

Mrs. Underdown testified that respondent told her that the checks she signed in blank—like respondent, she first thought, but she was not positive, there had been three, whereas there had been five, two of which were never used

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—were to be used for the payment of taxes, and there was no conversation about using any of them for the payment of fees.

Mrs. Underdown testified that she never authorized the drawing of the $800 check, and that she did not learn of the withdrawal until, in response to her request, she received the Bank's letter of August 21, 1962, transmitting the statement of the estate account. This is corroborated by Mrs. Underdown's letter of August 15, 1962, to the Grievance Committee, in which she complained of respondent's failure to distribute the proceeds of the sale of the New York City property, received in 1957, and his failure to answer her letters, although he was "paid" a retainer's fee of $300 of the Estate money", but makes no mention of his having received an additional $800—which, of course, she would have referred to in her complaint if she had known of it. This also refutes respondent's "belief" that he told Mrs. Underdown, not "specifically", but "in a general way", that he was going to draw the check.

Mrs. Underdown testified that when respondent came to her home in Washington, there was no reference to fees and the $800 check was not discussed; that respondent told her he had been in "some difficulty", and had used the

money. Respondent's testimony that on that occasion he said that, in view of the difference of opinion between them about the $800 withdrawal: "I will return the $800 to the account", is demonstrably untrue: the bank statement shows that he had already returned it—the deposit was made on August 31, 1962, which was after respondent had been informed by the Grievance Committee of the receipt of a complaint from Mrs. Underdown, but prior to respondent's visit to Washington, which was not until September, 1962. [33a] Respondent's concern on that occasion was to get Mrs. Underdown to withdraw her complaint to the Grievance Committee: he said if she would not appear before the Committee he would return the $700 in fees which he had received.

Mrs. Underdown was corroborated by her husband, who heard her end of her telephone conversation with Mr. Baker at the time of his retainer, who accompanied Mrs. Underdown on all her visits to New York in reference to this matter, and who was present at the interview with respondent at their home in Washington.

Mrs. Underdown impressed me as a frank, straightforward and truthful witness, with an excellent memory, and I would have believed her in preference to respondent, whose veracity left much to be desired, even if she had not been corroborated by her husband, who also impressed me as entirely credible.

I am convinced that there never was a retainer, written or oral, by which Mrs. Underdown agreed to pay Mr. Baker, or after him, respondent, any specified fraction or percentage of the amount of the estate, or of what Mrs. Underdown would receive therefrom; that respondent

was not authorized, or entitled, to use, for the payment of his fee, any of the signed blank checks which Mrs. Underdown left with him; that he never told Mrs. Underdown that he intended to use, and she never authorized him to use, any of those checks for the payment of a fee to himself; that his drawing of the $800, and his using the proceeds thereof, were improper, and that his testimony to the contrary of the foregoing was knowingly untrue.

In my opinion this Charge has been established.

[34]

CHARGE III. The Petition alleges:

> Respondent was retained by Top Hall Social Club in August 1962 to procure its incorporation; in October, 1962, respondent prepared and delivered to the president of the club a letter stating:
>
> > "This is to inform you that the approval of your corporation (stock) is in the hands of the undersigned and you are competent to operate under a charter and certificate of incorporation"—
>
> whereas, in fact, the club's Certificate of Incorporation was not issued until, and was dated, June 12, 1963.

THE ANSWER:

All the allegations of this charge were denied in respondent's verified answer. In his amended answer, they are all admitted, by failure to deny.

Respondent's failure to undertake to revise his amended answer on this charge, as he did on the others, stems from the fact that, by the time his attention was called to the state of the pleadings, the president of the club had al-

ready testified and respondent seemed content to let the matter stand that way.

The Evidence

Respondent admits that on or about August 9, 1962, he was retained, and was paid a fee, to procure a Certificate of Incorporation for a group who called themselves "Top Hat Social Club", and that on October 30, 1962, respondent wrote, and signed, a letter to Nathaniel Sligh, the president of the club, in which respondent said:

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> "This is to inform you that the approval of your Corporation (stock) is in the hands of the undersigned and you are competent to operate under a charter and Certificate of Incorporation.
>
> Though we did experience some difficulty in obtaining same, requiring me to appear in Albany twice * * * we were finally successful."

The letter then referred to the need of a meeting to discuss the "corporate outfit" which would be needed, following the obtaining of which there would be a "formal meeting for the very serious purpose of corporate organization."

Sligh testified that he told respondent that members of the club were complaining about the delay in getting the charter; that they were giving Sligh a "hard time", and that respondent wrote the letter in response to Sligh's request that respondent give him something "to get the fellows off my back."

The letter was completely false: the Certificate of Incorporation had not been issued and, in fact, was not issued until about eight months later, i.e., on June 12, 1963.

Both respondent and Sligh testified that the delay had been caused, in part, by the unavailability of several successive names which club owners had suggested, and by the illness of respondent's wife. It is difficult to believe that inability to find an available name, and respondent's wife's illness, could have caused a delay of about ten months from the time of retainer to the time of getting the Certificate, and it is clear that Sligh, despite his testimony, knew that there was no adequate excuse for the delay. Thus, as late as March 14, 1963, Sligh, as president of the club, joined [36]
with DuBois, the Secretary, in a letter to respondent in which, in the name of the club, they wrote:

> "We have grown tired of waiting to hear from you pertaining to the charter that you were to obtain for us * * * you have failed to at least notify us as to the progress you have made."

and the letter stated, further, that unless respondent sent the charter within seven days from the receipt of the letter, which was sent by certified mail, the club would take

> "some form of legal action."

If, in fact, the delay had been caused by the reasons testified to by respondent and Sligh, no one would have known of them better than the members of the club themselves, and there would have been no need to give a false reason to help Sligh get them "off my back." The letter was, obviously, respondent's contribution to a scheme to conceal his neglect from his clients, the members of the club.

In my opinion this charge was sustained.

[37]

CHARGE IV: The petition alleges:

> In seven specified cases, respondent (1) made either no, or an inadequate, response to letters from the Grievance Committee's counsel requesting information in regard to complaints against respondent therein described, or to respondent's failure to respond to previous letters or invitations in reference thereto, and (2) failed to appear in connection therewith when requested, except at hearings before the Committee after charges had been preferred, or at the specific direction of the Committee during the course of said hearings.

THE ANSWER

Respondent's original answer denied all the allegations of the petition in reference to this charge.

At the hearing on September 14, 1966, respondent asked that these allegations be left "open", to permit him to examine the letters.

In respondent's amended answer, he

> "admits that in some instances (a through g) letters were not answered but an explanation of respondent's position was given or the reason no explanation could be given at that time was tendered, but in no event was he guilty of neglect."

During the October 18, 1966 hearing, petitioner gave respondent notice that it would apply to the referee for leave to amend this charge by adding additional cases, in which the communications to which respondent had failed to re-

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spond had been sent too late to be referred to in the petition, and that if leave to amend were denied, petitioner

would offer the letters as evidence of a common plan or usage of respondent to ignore petitioner's request for information. The motion was subsequently made, and respondent having failed to show that adding these communications by amendment of the petition would affect him any differently from what they would if they had been originally included therein, the motion was granted. (See In re Rosenberg, 276 App. Div. 268, 271, 1st Dept. 1950; Matter of Horovitz, 228 App. Div. 484, 485, 1st Dept. 1930), and the letters were received in evidence.

The exhibits introduced under this charge and the amendment thereof were given numbers 17 to 38, inclusive, though in some cases the exhibit includes more than one letter.

THE EVIDENCE

It would be unnecessarily repetitious to refer to the contents of each of these letters referred to in this charge: reference to a few typical ones will give the general tenor of all of them.

The opening letter in the series here involved, dated August 17, 1962, requests respondent to appear at the Committee's office in connection with a complaint which had been made against him, and continues:

"Heretofore it has been generally our experience, when seeking to secure information from you regarding complaints concerning your professional conduct, that several such requests were necessary before you saw fit

[39]

to respond to them. You are reminded that failure to cooperate with this Committee also constitutes professional misconduct and it is urged that there be no repetition of that experience in this matter."

Letter after letter was sent to respondent requesting him to call at the Committee's office in reference to other complaints which had been made against him. One such letter, dated November 28, 1962, reads, in part:

> "You are advised that you have heretofore failed to keep some half dozen appointments to call at this office to discuss certain matters pending before us."

Another letter, this one dated June 24, 1964, refers to respondent's failure to respond to two earlier letters and contains the following:

> "It should be unnecessary to remind you that it is precisely this pattern of continued non-cooperation which, in great measure, has led to prior charges against you and hearings thereon by the Committee on Grievances. If you persist in ignoring our inquiries concerning the asserted misapplication of moneys delivered to you by Milton E. Turner, it can only result in additional charges."

The refrain throughout is the same: the failure to answer letters advising respondent of the receipt of complaints against him by his clients, and requesting a statement from him of his position in regard thereto; the continued failure to pay attention to successive requests for replies to letters sent him; letters calling attention to the inadequacy of an-

[40]

swers which respondent had made to earlier inquiries; the failure to respond to requests to call at the Committee's office in reference to complaints against him; the failure, sometimes persistent and continuous, to keep appointments previously made, etc., etc.

Respondent's answer to all this is that he had been engaged in the trial of the Pugash case for four months, and that immediately following that engagement he was prevented from consulting some of his files because Mr. Baker had denied him access to them for respondent's failure to pay his office rent.

These excuses are sham. Respondent relation to the Pugash case ended in late fall or early winter of 1961: the Underdown letters referred to in the petition run from August 17 to November 28, 1962, those in *Houghton* were dated October 10, 1962 and June 17, 1963; in *Kent*, they were in late 1962, and May 1963; in *Nelson* they did not begin until May 1963; in *Smith* the letter was dated October 2, 1963, and in *Obledo* and *Anglin*, it was dated December 17, 1963.

Obviously, respondent's preoccupation with the Pugash case, and his alleged difficulty with Mr. Baker immediately thereafter, furnish no excuse for respondent's contemptuous attitude toward the Committee's aforesaid letters—in many case a failure even to acknowledge them—or his unexplained failure to keep appointments which he had made.

When he was before the Grievance Committee, respondent said:

> "99% of these complaints got here because of a failure to communicate between myself and the clients, the inability to communicate at the time. I find myself in better circumstances now, and I can assure this Com-
>
> [41]
>
> mittee that from hence forward I will not be derelict and not fail in any matter so far as the practice of law is concerned."

Despite respondent's aforesaid assurances to the Committee, we find the same pattern of disregard of its communications thereafter, as witness the letters introduced under the amendment of the petition, which run during a period commencing February 1964 and ending September 1966.

With respect to these communications, respondent stated that he had not had time to consult his records in reference to the matters therein referred to, and when the hearings were about to close he requested, and was granted, permission to submit a written answer to the charge based on them, which answer, it was agreed, would be accepted with the same effect as if he had so testified at the hearing. Respondent has not submitted any such writing, nor has he offered any excuse for not doing so. The charge, to the extent it is based on these letters, is, therefore, admitted.

The failure of an attorney to cooperate with the Grievance Committee is unprofessional conduct. "Such conduct", this Court recently said,

> "Cannot be overlooked or condoned * * * Full and forthright cooperation with the committee is essential to the proper performance of its function, and the withholding of such cooperation without cause must be judged a grave disservice to the public interest." [Matter of Hubscher, 25 AD 2d, 113, 114 (1 D. 1966)].

See also, to the same effect:

Matter of Pines, 26 A. D. 2d, 424 (1 D. 1966);

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Matter of Sultan, 26 A. D. 2d, 210 (1 D. 1966);
Matter of Somers, 22 A. D. 2d, 325 (1 D. 1965);
Matter of Thomson, 23 A. D. 2d, 441.

Respondent's lack of respect for his professional obligations is reflected not only in the way he ignored communications from his clients and from the Committee, but by his conduct in these proceedings. As examples: his long continued failure, before finally doing so, to carry out his promise to send the Underdowns the money to cover their expenses in attending the hearing herein, despite the fact that his promise to do so was the consideration of the granting to him of an adjournment he requested; his disregard of the referee's direction to notify the referee whether or not he had performed that promise; his failure to sign the stipulation pursuant to the arrangement made in the conference with Mr. Justice Breitel for the hearing on June 9, 1966, and his failure to proceed in accordance with the promise he made at that conference; his failure to serve his amended answer within the time he promised he would; his failure to serve a revised amended answer, for which permission was granted in response to his request, and in the absence of which all allegations of charges I, II and III stand undenied; his failure to submit his explanation with respect to the letters added by amendment to Charge IV, after being granted permission, at his request, to do so in lieu of oral testimony; his failure to acknowledge receipt of documents sent to him at his request by the referee, despite the referee's request, in the letter of transmittal, that he acknowledge receipt thereof. [43]

In my opinion this charge was sustained.

New York, March 10th 1967

Respectfully submitted,

GEORGE TROSK
Referee